

Guidance for Volunteers Supporting Self-Isolators: Five tips to manage your own psychological and emotional wellbeing

Members of local communities across the United Kingdom (UK) have rapidly united to support the elderly and vulnerable during their time self-isolating from the Covid-19 outbreak, with volunteers coming forward in their hundreds to support organisations such as Covid Mutual Aid. As this continues, it is highly important for volunteers to consider their psychological and emotional wellbeing, whilst carrying out their admirable work within their communities. Consider this guidance as a set of psychologically-informed self-guided tips, with the aim of "helping the helpers":

1 Self-care: to support others the best you can, you need to look after yourself as well – *consider this the backbone of this guidance*. It is highly likely that volunteering for organisations such as Covid Mutual Aid will come with both physical and emotional challenges, many of which may be new for volunteers given that the circumstances of the outbreak are unprecedented. To avoid burnout (physical or emotional), these challenges need to be balanced with self-care strategies. Draw on those you have used in the past or consult advice online for ideas. *Some are provided in the appendix of this document.*

2 Be aware of your signs of stress: To know when to use self-care strategies, you need to be aware of your personal signs of stress (these can vary for everyone). Have a think about writing these down as 'early warning signs' – these may be changes in the way that you are thinking, behaving or feelings (physical and emotionally). When these are on the rise, take action with the previous tip. Remember, feeling stressed is no reflection of your ability to be a volunteer. Stress is expected but needs to be managed when it becomes too high or overwhelming: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

3 Connect with others: Due to Covid-19 our contact with others is becoming increasingly limited (with good reason) and we may miss those close to us who are self-isolating. As a volunteer, you may be carrying out some support roles on your own or in pairs. Because of this, you may experience loneliness and therefore, staying connected with others is important. Because of the risk of virus spread, this can be done via social media, including video calls. Peer support is also going to be beneficial. Consider pairing up with another volunteer to talk about your experiences, perhaps via WhatsApp. Remember that others in the local team will be going through similar experiences – *you aren't alone!*

4 Stay informed: It may seem that with each new day, comes more uncertainty. Uncertainty can be the fuel to worry and anxiety. We can combat this by being up to date with emerging policies and fact-checked information. Focus on making practical decisions that relate to this guidance, not on the 'what ifs'. Knowing this guidance will also make you feel more confident when asked questions by those you are supporting: <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

5 Self-Compassion: Remind yourself that you are doing your bit for the local community, which is an incredible thing. Be kind to yourself, as you are to others, and allow yourself to have certain worries and to take time out when you need it. It may help to keep a log of your positive actions, which can also be shared with others to amplify the positivity that comes with the work volunteers are doing.

Appendix: Five tips to manage your own psychological and emotional wellbeing

We hope that these tips are helpful to support your emotional and psychological wellbeing when volunteering. If you find that you need some further support, remember to reach out to local services – this could be: Samaritans who provide a listening service (**116 123**) or local IAPT primary care services: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/>

About the authors: This guidance was written by *Charlie Cole* (clinical psychologist in training and qualified primary care psychological practitioner), who co-evaluated the Ebola Psychological Support Service in Sierra Leone for front-line in-country staff, and *Conor O'Brien* (Trainee Representative for the Association of Clinical Psychologists; ACP). This guidance was written by amending existing literature on how to manage psychological and emotional wellbeing as a volunteer during crises as well as World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance:

- WHO (2020). *Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak*. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2
- Quevillon, R. P., Gray, B. L., Erickson, S. E., Gonzalez, E. D., & Jacobs, G. A. (2016). *Helping the Helpers: Assisting Staff and Volunteer Workers Before, During, and After Disaster Relief Operations*. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jclp.22336>

Resources recommended to support psychological and emotional wellbeing:

- [https://4648dcw4pye15w61x1reklps-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/assets/covid-19/guide to living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty en-gb.pdf](https://4648dcw4pye15w61x1reklps-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/assets/covid-19/guide%20to%20living%20with%20worry%20and%20anxiety%20amidst%20global%20uncertainty%20en-gb.pdf)
- <https://e-tmf.org/app/uploads/2020/03/FACE-COVID-How-to-respond-effectively-to-the-Corona-crisis-by-Russ-Harris>

'FACE COVID'

How to respond effectively to the Corona crisis
by Dr Russ Harris, author of *The Happiness Trap*

'FACE COVID' is a set of practical steps for responding effectively to the Corona crisis, using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Here's a quick summary of the key steps, and in the pages that follow we'll explore them all in more depth:

F = Focus on what's in your control
A = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings
C = Come back into your body
E = Engage in what you're doing

C = Committed action
O = Opening up
V = Values
I = Identify resources
D = Disinfect & distance

